THE DECLINE OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND THE ASCENDANCY OF THE BUREAUCRACY IN EAST PAKISTAN 1947-54

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CHAPTER 7

POLICE, PEOPLE, AND PROTEST

I

The Muslim League's incapacity to control the police force and its eventual dependence on them as the mainstay of state power introduced tensions into the League itself; in addition, it directly contributed to certain developments in the realm of politics. I also intend to highlight in this chapter instances where the police could not be controlled by civil bureaucrats and magistrates. Much of the erosion of the legitimacy of the Muslim League rule in East Pakistan was caused by the brutality, unlicensed tyranny, and corruption of the police.

The press and the members of the Opposition in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly on many occasions exposed police atrocities on the population in a language that quite often verged on sentimentality. The Muslim League leadership in government explained police atrocities in terms of inexperience and indiscipline of the force. But people refused to see the regime as something different in intent and purpose from the police actions . Indeed, people's interpretation of 'political independence' did not fit well with what the police called 'law and order', and as a result a number of serious clashes occured.

Police power was liberally employed to sustain the Muslim League rule; as a result 'police excesses' occurred at a regular rate. In a propaganda tract on the six years of Muslim League rule in East Pakistan that the United Front circulated at the time of the March 1954 election , cases of police atrocities featured prominently and the League was called a 'Murderer'.[1] It was, in fact, the Front's pledge to limit police power that inspired the people to vote for the United Front in the first general election in the province.

II

East Pakistan police numbered 1083 officers and 12935 men during 1948.[2] According to a report by the Inspector-General of Police, the department started with a shortage of 2,500 constables.[3] In 'a year of unprecedented stress and strain' the *mofussil* police, with its strength and equipment based on a condition that obtained half a century ago, was entrusted to tackle the problem that multiplied manifold due to the partition of the province. The police force, the officers complained, was pitifully small in 1948 compared to the population and the area of the country. There was one policeman for every 3.4 square miles and for every 2700 people. But even this represented a substantial increase in the intensity of policing of the society over the previous hundred years when in 1837 there was one policeman to every 15 square miles and to 3,900 people.[4] Still policing was scanty, according to the Inspector-General of Police in 1948,who suggested 'enlargement of strength and equipment of the Forces'.[5]

There were altogether 428 police stations in the province of which 184 were without telegraph offices within easy reach. Most of the province was criss-crossed with rivers, and the only means of transport was provided by the slow-moving country boats. Ninety seven vehicles including motorcycles, of which four had been condemned, twenty eight steam and motor launches, sixteen wireless stations, most of which were closed down for lack of staff, constituted the infrastructure of the police department in August 1947.[6]

Due to the partition of the Province, the district forces were to a large extent disorganised. According to the Inspector-General of Police 'a heavy strain was placed on the police in connection with border troubles which were frequent. They were also called upon to guard the railway lines in connection with threatened strike and sabotage'.[7] Eighty one border outposts were created as a temporary measure to deal with border troubles.[8]

The belief that a decisive use of force was beneficial for the general maintenance of state power was colonial in origin, and behind this belief lay a persistent fear that unless the government intervened promptly and forcefully to suppress even minor outbreaks of

violence its authority could suffer.[9] The outlook continued to influence the police and the leaders of the Muslim League. Indeed, the police emerged as the biggest single instrument used by the ruling party in dealing with the unsettled conditions created by the partition. 'Strengthening the Police force', the Prime Minister stated, 'was an imperative necessity'.[10] As early as February 1948 the Inspector-General of Police suggested an immediate increase in the strength of the force 'in view of the vastly changed circumstances'. Disturbed border conditions, the influx of large number of refugees and the concomitant rehabilitation of them, and the general and considerable increase in crime were put forward as reasons to justify enlargement of the force.[11] The Police Committee that was announced on 23 August 1949 to look into the police requirements of the province found the force inadequate. After giving their 'anxious consideration' to the question, the committee concluded that an increase of the size of the constabulary was 'absolutely necessary'.[12] As a result, the force was 'enlarged in size'. In 1952 the number of constables reached 18413. By June 1954, the strength of the total force reached close to 40,000.[13]

The increased spending on the police force put pressure on the 'sick' economy of the provinces. The Prime Minister admitted in the Assembly that 'there [had] been a very big increase in the police budget' and a large proportion of East Pakistan's revenue now went to the Police Department. Not only were the local critics of the government unhappy about the expenditure on the police, the Central Government, according to the Prime Minister, 'pointed its finger at the Police budget'. The Central Government, in fact, was 'very bitter that such a large percentage of the revenue should go for the Police budget'.[14]

The sudden and very large expansion of the force also contributed to the lowering of its efficiency and discipline.[15] Quick promotion for officers resulted in a fall in the quality of supervision.[16] The Police Committee recognised that the greatest problem regarding improvement of the force involved the subordinate ranks; their knowledge, manners,

bearing and efficiency were not deemed satisfactory for the policing of 'a democratic society'.[17]

To aid the police in rural areas *chowkidars* and *dafadars* 'existed in one form or another' under the Bengal Village Self Government Act of 1919. The total number of *dafadars* and *chowkidars* employed in 1948 was 49,649. The number, however, fell to 40,051 in 1953. The Police Committee also recorded that 'the quality of the work of *chowkidars*' had deteriorated over the preceding two decades. The police authorities became sceptical about the efficiency of the rural police in their dealings with 'suspects' and 'proclaimed offenders'.

A conference of the Deputy Inspectors-General of Police with the Inspector-General held at Dhaka on 10 and 11 November 1947 unanimously concluded that 'a volunteer force' should have been raised to assist the police in the situation that obtained in the province immediately after the attainment of political independence. It was also resolved that each union would have had its own force. The Chief Secretary of the East Bengal Government also suggested that 150,000 men from the province be recruited to form what would be called the *ansar* organization. Of them 15,000 were to be trained in the use of arms. It was suggested that they could be recruited from the 200,000 or so Muslim League National Guards, a body already in existence in the province.[18]

In 1948, the East Bengal Legislative Assembly passed the *ansars* Act 'to mobilize the resources of [the] Province to ensure the safety of the State and to prepare for the great task of social and economic reconstruction.'[19] The *ansars* acted as auxiliary police and sometimes as an auxiliary defence force. Towards the end of September 1948 the activities of the *ansars* organisation received a further boost as a result of the decision of the government to recruit into the organisation as many able-bodied citizens of Eastern Pakistan as possible.[20] It was also decided that 1,000 *ansars* for each sub-division would receive musketry training. By November 1948 about 70,000 *ansars* were recruited and 52,391 members of the *ansars* were trained in the use of fire-arms by January

1949.[21] In presenting the Budget for 1951-52, the Finance Minister told the Parliament that the *ansar* organisation had justified its existence by providing an auxiliary Police Force for discharging police functions by rendering useful services to the State and the people.[22]

The *ansar* activities were almost entirely controlled by a Deputy Inspector-General of Police and all the resources of the Police Department, including instructors and arms were made available to this organisation. Thus the Muslim League volunteers created and raised during the last days of the Raj to serve the community were disbanded and many of them were absorbed into the agencies of the State. Instead of the Party controlling the *ansars*, the latter were now being controlled by the police. The State created and maintained the *ansars* at a very low cost. Indeed, the per-capita cost of maintaining and strengthening all the forces related to law and order was not much. 'East Bengal Police', commented the Inspector-General of Police in 1948, 'was perhaps the cheapest in the world; the housing and clothing of the force left a great deal to be desired; the pay and emoluments did not increase commensurate with the increase in the cost of living'. The main basis for fixing the pay appeared to have been the standard of living of an average man of the strata of the society from which the constables were drawn.[23] As far as the constables were concerned the pay seemed to have been fixed in the past on the basis that they could be classed as unskilled labourers, and with reference to what men of that class (from which the constables were drawn) generally earned in normal conditions.

The Police Committee observed that the pay of the lower police was inadequate but they did not recommend a rise in their pay; instead, the committee expected that the government would bring down the cost of living.[24] This was a task that proved impossible for the Muslim League government to achieve. Obviously, the poorer sections of the police were left to live off the people. This attitude of the government was much resented by the police themselves. In a leaflet issued by some constables listing a set of

demands, they alleged that the Ministers of the Government did not think it necessary to increase their pay for they believed that the police were all corrupt.[25]

To assume that all the members of the force enjoyed this predatory life imposed on them by the State system would be to overlook their struggle to reform the latter. The lower police of Dhaka staged a strike in 1948 for higher pay and better amenities. The military intervened and killed four of them and injured several.[26] Policemen were also at times affected by the issues that agitated the East Bengali community. Thus, while it is true that on 21 February 1952, the day of the language riot in Dhaka the police did fire on the crowd, it is also well known that many members of the force had sympathy for this movement aimed at securing for the Bengali language recognition as one of the state languages of Pakistan. Tajuddin Ahmed mentioned in his diary on 1 March 1952, while he was travelling in a train, he overheard a group of armed police headed by a *havildar* expressing support for the State Language Movement.[27] Isolated instances of such kind were definitely there. But the force, along with its auxiliaries were in the main disliked by the people. As we shall see, there were reasons for this antipathy.

III

Often the behaviour of the police towards the people was as oppressive as it had been during the colonial period. To many a policeman political independence meant the beginning of a 'police Raj' - 'a regime in which the police occupied a crucial position in the ordering of rural and urban society, in the suppression of political opposition and in the maintenance of State and class control'.[28]

Of all the tyrannies of the police the worst was the indiscriminate use of firearms on flimsy grounds: from September 1947 till the end of August 1948 - within a year of independence - on no less than 58 occasions the police fired on people. On 2 September 1948, the Acting Inspector-General of Police, in a memorandum to all All Range Deputy Inspectors General of Police, found it necessary to point out to the Superintendents of Police that the 'police should not resort to firing until there [was] ample justification for

using it'.[29] This memorandum seemed to have had very little effect on the trigger-happy force. In 1949 the police fired on people on 90 occasions all over the province.

According to the Inspector-General of Police, in the majority of cases the police had to shoot in self-defence.[30] In the Police Order No. 1 of 1949, issued by the Inspector-General of Police on 21 April 1949, it was noted that 'in recent months ... there has been an unfortunate increase in the cases of firing by the police'. The Inspector-General urged the Superintendents of Police to explain his instructions at muster parades at headquarters frequently in order that the subordinate police understood fully the implications of the use of force by them on members of the public.[31] Obviously, the highest police bureaucrat realized that the lower ranks failed to understand the implication of using violent methods on the people while carrying out official instructions. As a result of this diagnosis, which had actually been made nearly a year before this order was issued, all the armed constables had to go through a 'short period of intensive refresher course' within three months of August 1948 in order to remedy this unsatisfactory state of affairs.[32] However, the situation at best remained unchanged, if it did not actually worsen. The following table gives an idea about the frequency of police violence on the people of East Bengal during the early years of political independence.

In 1952 and 1953 there were 37 and 48 cases of use of fire arms by the Police.[33]

The police, in fact, continued to abuse authority, to intensify tyranny, to violate customary rights, to interfere in the matters of civil disputes, and to thwart the people's desire to participate in nation-building activities. In order to gain a better understanding of police excesses a number of incidents where police used firearms and killed people, are outlined below.

One such incident occurred in Gazaria *beel* of Manikganj police station in Dhaka district on 18 December 1948. According to the Secretary of the Manikganj branch of the Muslim League it was an 'unjustified firing on unarmed peaceful public by Manikganj police ...

TABLE 7.1

District-wise breakdown of use of firearms by the Police in the Province of East Bengal, for the years 1948-1951

District	1948	1949	1950	1951
Dacca	11	4	6	5
Faridpur	2	5	4	1
Barisal	8	14	7	6
Mymensingh	2	19	29	2
Chittagong	3	4	8	6
Comilla	1	4	2	5
Hill Tracts	-	1	2	2
Noakhali	-	6	4	1
Rajshahi	-	-	3	1
Khulna	-	7	5	7
Dinajpur	-	3	-	3
Bogra	-	1	-	-
Rangpur	1	7	10	5
Kushtia	1	-	15	-
Sylhet	4	7	9	4
Jessore	5	8	3	
Pabna	1	2	2	2
TOTAL	38	90	110	50

[Source: Report of the Police Administration of the Province of East Bengal, Years 1948-1951, EBGP, Dacca]

causing death and grievous injuries'.[34] The police opened fire on *poluas* (Persons who catch fish with *polos*) numbering about three to four thousand while they were fishing in Gazaria *Beel* causing death to one person and injuring four others. This 'overzealous' act of a 'trigger conscious' officer-in-charge of a police station, according to the enquiring magistrate, 'greatly excited' the public. Processions condemning the incident continued for some days and a public meeting was held where the police action was condemned.[35] The Enquiring Officer commented that 'the *poluas* fired upon were plying *polos* in tenant's rayati lands and were unarmed and did not threaten anybody and did not commit criminal trespass upon the landlord's portion of the *beel* and did not commit any mischief and formed no unlawful assembly'.[36] In fact, according to him, the *poluas* were fishing on the tenants' land where they caught fish every year and were also entitled to do so. He concluded in his report that 'the Police firing in question was unnecessary and unjustified and the Officer-in-Charge's order to open fire was not according to law'.

The abrupt and brutal nature of police intervention was in evidence again within three months of the Gazaria *beel* incident. This time the violence occurred at a place called Buchahati Bamandanga in Gaibandha subdivision of Rangpur district on 16 March 1949. In this particular incident a sub-inspector and three armed constables opened fire on a large number of people who gathered to catch fish in a *zamindar's beel*. As a result three persons were killed and five others were injured.[37] The Inspector-General of Police urged the subordinate officials 'to prevent similar further mischief by uninformed acts on the part of *thana* officers'.[38] But this cautionary note failed to prevent such incidents from repeating. The police again opened fire on a gathering of about one thousand people who came to catch fish in Noai Mondol *beel* in Char Haripur police station of Sirajganj sub-division in Pabna district on 29 December 1951. As a result one person was killed and several others sustained injuries. This time it happened despite a circular issued by the Inspector-General of Police. A higher official commented on the incident that it was 'rather unfortunate that in spite of discussion ... on a similar ... firing the police have again interfered in a civil dispute'.[39]

In all three incidents the police interfered with the customary rights of the villagers who came to catch fish in the marshes and swamps locally known as *beel*. After the incident at Noai Mondol *beel* at Char Haripur an official commented that it was a 'matter of civil dispute between the alleged lessee and the villagers' who contended that they caught fish in the *beel* every year.[40] The observation of the Inspector-General of Police on case number 75 of 1949, i.e. on the police firing at Buchahati Bamandanga in Rangpur, was that 'the Sub-Inspector argued with the people who had come to catch fish in pursuance of a customary right and tried to persuade them not to catch fish in the course of which altercation ensued'.[41] The Enquiring Officer who investigated the Gazaria *beel* firing contended that the Officer-in-Charge of Manikganj police station was informed that the *poluas* caught fish every year in the *beel*.[42]

In fact, the rights of the people to catch fish in the marshes and swamps of East Bengal was long established. The beels served 'as a reservoir of fresh water fish ample enough to provide a secondary source of livelihood for a predominantly rice growing population of the province. As a result a large number of the villagers exploited the beels'.[43] In 1923 O'Malley observed that 'Besides regular fishing *polo* fishing is an old pastime indulged in by the villagers in the summer'. He also observed that men, women and children, sometimes numbering hundreds troop with *polos* in hand to the nearest *beel*.[44] Normally *polo* fishing was followed by prior announcements to the neighbouring village *bazars* by indigenous means. The father of a 'victim' of police firing deposed to the Enquiring Officer that there was an 'announcement by beat of drum that fish would be caught in Gazaria beel'.[45]

In all the three incidents the police alleged that 'a large mob armed with deadly weapons and fishing apparatus' assembled to catch fish thus causing 'apprehension of a serious breach of peace'. But according to practice and witnesses the *poluas* had no deadly weapon with them 'as at *polo baises* (competition) *joties*, *tatas*, *katras*, and *koches* were not allowed to be used' and indeed could not be used since fishes did not float and hurling of such instruments was considered dangerous to the crowd of *poluas*.[46] In fact

in all the three *beels* the villagers numbering more than thousands came to exercise their customary rights to fish and not with any common intention to assault the police. Rather, the police in their uncalled for intervention were not acting in their capacity of public servants. The visibility of these customary forces of collective behaviour made them convenient targets for members of the police force. One official commented that 'the Police displayed indecent zeal on receipt of information of apprehension of breach of peace by not informing the Sub-divisional Officer and acting on their own'.[47] In no cases there was any apprehension of breach of peace simply because there were no restraining parties to give resistance to the *poluas*.

The Inspector-General of Police commented that 'the elements which entitled the Police to use firearms for the protection of fishing rights did not exist' and therefore he dismissed the justification of the deputation of armed force.[48] Commenting on the Gazaria *beel* firing the District Magistrate wrote in his confidential note that 'Police administration in the Sub-Division has been in a bad way'.[49] Cases of this nature where a *thana* officer acted in an 'utterly irresponsible' and irregular manner gave vent to deeper antagonism between the affected communities and the police. One official explanation was that this kind of action could only happen from 'lack of assessment of situation due to lack of training'.[50] This perception which was not uncommon in higher police bureaucracy overlooked or deliberately concealed the relationship between the powerful section of the rural world and the police.

It was invariably the dominant villagers who sought, and quite often 'bought' and utilised police power to their advantage. In all three cases the police acted on behalf of the owner of the land and intervened in the customary practice of fishing by the villagers in the *beels*. The Home Secretary in his note suspected that the officer-in-charge of Manikganj police station did act in the Gazaria *beel* firing case 'from motives of gain'.[51]

The use of firearms by the police being induced by powerful persons was quite common. On 22 January 1952 the police resorted to shooting in a village fair in Savar police station

in Dhaka district and killed one person. According to the report of the Executive Enquiry 'there were two parties of gamblers in the *mela* (fair) and one of the parties influenced the police party to drive away the other'.[52] Police intervention was not only confined to brutally attacking the customary rights of the people on such occasions, but also to interfering in land disputes between 'parties', the police word for contending groups. In fact, partisan policing continued to remain a prominent feature of public action in post-independent East Bengal Society.

On 31 March 1948 at Char Digaldi police station in Dhaka district the police intervened to stop 'forcible harvesting of paddy' by members of one 'party' from the land of another. As a result a conflict started and the police opened fire. And three persons were killed.[53] A similar incident happened in Ghona Bashiapara in Satkhira police station of Khulna district on 9 December 1952. The police acted on behalf of one Aminuddin when some cart men were engaged to carry the reaped paddy of one Abdul Huq Gazi. The cart men refused to comply with the police order to divert the paddy to the house of the President of the Union Board. As a result the police assaulted the cart men and opened fire to disperse villagers who gathered to protest against the assault of the cart men.[54] One of the most flagrant instances of partisan policing took place on 20 November 1952 at Nabinagar police station of Comilla district. The police intervened in a private land dispute and opened fire and killed four persons 'most unjustifiably and unreasonably'. The Judicial Enquiry report on this firing used strong words to condemn this kind of police action that took place in Nabinagar.[55]

On some other occasions, too, the police opened fire to disperse people who came to resist police actions considered illegal and unjustified by the people. On 29 March 1950 at Pukhali in Jessore district the police opened fire on the people who offered resistance to one head constable and a lower constable alleged to have come to terms with some members of the minority community who apparently/allegedly tried to transfer contraband articles and movable properties across the border to India in exchange for money.[56] Sometimes subordinate police opened fire on the people out of revenge and hatred. On

13 October 1949, the Pakistan Observer reported that 'Following a scuffle between a boy and a police constable, attached to Kazipur police station, at Kazipur *hat* the latter was severely assaulted by the crowd ... On receiving this information, the Kazipur police, armed with guns, hastened to the spot and resorted to firing, wounding seriously one person' who later succumbed.[57] Incidents of a similar nature where the police acted out of feelings of revenge were not infrequent. When peasants rebelled, police, on a number of occasions,opened fire and carried out wanton atrocities on the struggling peasants in revenge for rebellion.[58]

Police atrocities were not limited to occasionally shooting people whimsically; in fact, instances of 'gross illegality committed by persons entrusted with the maintenance of law and order' were too many. Sometimes individuals in collusion with the police allegedly attempted to kidnap women whom they fancied. On 26 August 1951, the Sub-Divisional Officer in a Judicial Enquiry into police firing88 in Nagar-Kanda police station in Faridpur district mentioned that one Latif 'in collusion with the police ... attempted to elope Sahera Khatun,' a widow from village Pukuria.[59] On some other occasions the members of the law enforcing agencies were themselves allegedly involved in abducting women belonging to minority community. Indeed it was a recurrent complaint by the leaders of the Hindu community. In a petition to a Deputy Secretary of the Home Department, Rasaraj Mondol, General Secretary of East Bengal Schedule Caste Federation complained regarding the inaction of the police force in recovering a Hindu housewife allegedly abducted by an *ansar* Commander. He also alleged that 'as things stand the members of the minorities have lost all confidence in the police of the Kurigram *thana*.[60] Members of the minority community, especially their social leaders in the rural areas, brought many complaints against the police for the latter's alleged complicity with criminals. In one such complaint to the Chief Secretary, the President of the Baofal Union Board along with twenty four other signatories of Morrelganj and Kachua police stations of Khulna district alleged that 'cows and bullocks of householders generally of minority communities were stolen away at night and through the agents of the authors of the crime intimation is sent to the owners and heavy ransoms are realised to restore them'. They

further alleged that 'police authorities are aware of these crimes and perhaps of the authors thereof but no steps are known to be undertaken by them to prevent these heinous crimes'.[61]

The complaint of communal disposition of the police was made very strongly by Jogen Mondol in his letter of resignation from the Central Cabinet. He alleged that the police pursued an anti-Hindu policy and carried out barbarous atrocities against Hindus on frivolous grounds.[62] In fact, members of the minority community became panicky due to the changed political circumstances that deprived them of political power in post-independent East Bengal. But police *zulum* was uniformly applied to the social weaklings irrespective of caste and creed. The vertical ties that existed during the Raj between the lower police and the local elites - 'individuals with the wealth, influence, and authority to command their services' continued to be conspicuous and enduring in post-colonial East Bengal.[63] It will be evident from a memorandum to the Chief Minister on 10 April 1948, by Presidents of Union Boards of Shyamnagar police station of Khulna district. The memorialists alleged that 'the police *zulum* on the Muslims went on increasing day-by-day as their pockets began to be filled up with money paid by the Hindu Zamindars'. They also alleged that 'the police had indiscriminately arrested respectable Muslim *matbars* (social leaders) on false and flimsy grounds and put them in *hazat* (lock up) without any rhyme and reason'.[64] The incident that agitated the memorialists most was one that took place on 2 April 1948 when some people of Ranjan Nagar and neighbouring villages carrying coconuts and other merchandise worth about Rs 2000 from Nazimganj *hat* for business purposes, were robbed by members of the Border Police. When the villagers asked for money, some of them were taken to the police camp at Halderkhali and beaten to such an extent that one of them fainted and some others were wrongfully confined by the police and detained in the camp.[65]

The Prime Minister noted the incident as 'a case of Border Police oppression', while forwarding this for investigation.[66] 'The Zulum on the local people' reported a Member of the Legislative Assembly on 24 April 1948, 'had been done by the police so mercilessly

that they were forced to leave their houses along with their families.[67] The reason for police atrocities against the people as perceived by the memorialists was the resistance of the local people to the smuggling activities of the locally powerful Hindu *zamindars* in collusion with the Border Police.[68]

Many police outposts in the countryside, like the one I have mentioned, became centres of oppression for the socially disadvantaged groups in the countryside, be they Hindus or Muslims. The SDC Hakulaki reported that the *nankar* peasants after the police firing at Saneswar used to look askance at the police outpost. The sub-divisional officer of Gapalganj mentioned in a report on 21 February 1949 that 'some people, many of whom were *musalmans*, said that it was the wont of the constables of Maharajpur outpost to come out at night on patrol duty and extort money from the people ... and as such the outpost made itself a terror to the locality'.[69]

Quite often the manifestation of police power was disproportionate to the degree of alleged crime committed by the people. Instances of police raids on the houses of alleged criminals were many indeed; and complaints about police excesses, harassment and misbehaviour towards the members of the family of suspected criminals followed the raids. One Amir Hamja of village Nimbari of Comilla district petitioned the Prime Minister on 7 January 1950 complaining of police atrocities during a raid on his house. The police allegedly plundered his household goods worth Rs 2000, misbehaved with his wife and other members of the family. All this happened when he was away from home. He also mentioned that similar raids were being carried out in other villages also by the police of Kasba police station.[70] In another such complaint six persons of village Mohabbatpur of Noakhali district petitioned the Governor General of Pakistan, along with other officials in the hierarchy of administration, about police atrocities during a raid in their house on 20 May 1948, in their absence and without any warrant. The police allegedly destroyed household materials and abused the female members of the house who were present during the raid.[71] Indeed, the police had an exaggerated view of themselves. In their dealings with people they were haughty, impolite, and quite often oppressive. On 16 May

1949, thirty signatories from the area under the jurisdiction of the Nawabganj police station in Dhaka district petitioned the Prime Minister alleging that they had been 'groaning under various kinds of police *zulum* exacerbated by a *havilder* and the constables attached to Nawabganj outpost'. Many complained in the petition that the conduct of the police personnel unmistakeably showed that there was no power above them, that they were independent of control and supervision, and that they were 'the almighty and all powerful masters of the locality'.[72]

The authority entrusted by the State on the police tended to give them an exaggerated notion of their own power as though they were not accountable to anybody. In the complaint of the Secretary of the Sandip Association of Chittagong district to the Superintendent of Police on 20 July and again on 7 September 1952, signed by several boatmen of Sandip steamer station, the misuse of power by the police personnel was quite eloquent. The boatmen alleged that the police compelled them 'under threat of physical torture' to carry them to the steamer at unusual hours of night which involved a great risk to the safety of the boat and to their own lives. They further alleged that the policemen dragged them from their houses late at night, if they showed reluctance, without having any regard for the privacy of their womenfolk. Moreover, they never paid the boatmen for their services.[73] Some policemen demanded a total obedience to their authority. In this context argument was perceived to be an affront to their power. 'How dare you open your mouth in front of a Daroga' was the retort of a *thana* officer to a *nankar* peasant leader.[74] Here police power corresponded closely with the feudal power that prevailed in the East Bengal Society. Norms of verbal deference and silence as a sign of subordination to authority was demanded of the people by the police officials.[75] As a result quite often policemen resorted to feudal forms of punishment and dealings with the people. One police sub-inspector of Ramgati police station in Noakhali district was alleged to have said ' I can do and undo whatever I like, because I am empowered to arrest anybody'.[76] In an incident between a government employee and a circle inspector of police in Lakshmipur police station in Noakhali, the said officer allegedly told a bus driver that 'If you find these people [the employees

belonging to the Constructions and Buildings Department of the Government] run them down and bring them to me after they are killed'.

This particular policemen was sentenced after being found guilty by the Court for assaulting a government employee.[77] But for most of the poor this option was simply unavailable. Lack of education and financial resources deprived the masses of even such rights as freedom from arrest and protection from police *zulum*. On the powers that the police exercised over the population, the constitutional checks had been almost inoperative.[78]

On 10 April 1948, the memorialists of Shyamnagar in Khulna after the police atrocities complained that 'nobody can dare lodge any information to the authorities concerned against the Border Police.[79] 'Some of the alleged victims of the police excesses', recorded a Civil Servant in his enquiry report on ... April 1948, 'refused to make any statement'.[80] After the police atrocities in some villages of Sylhet one affected woman deposed to the sub-Deputy Collector when asked if she could produce any witness in support of her statement, 'No, through fear of *zamindars* and the police of the camp, nobody will dare give any evidence because as soon as you will go, police will come, catch hold of anyone who will depose, arrest him and realize money from him'.[81]

This apprehension and fear of a village woman proved to be real on a number of occasions. On 16 December 1947 one Amir Ali of Kandipara in Mymensingh district petitioned the Chief Secretary of the East Bengal Government alleging police atrocities which occurred following his lodgement of a criminal case against a sub-inspector of police attached to Graffargaon police station for the latter's 'high handedness, wrongful restraint, wrongful confinement, assault and extortions'. As the petition sought legal protection the police party raided and arrested some of the witnesses and mercilessly assaulted them 'regardless of their age'.[82] After the police firing at Nabinagar in which four persons were killed, Jaj Mia, who belonged to the same party as these victims, was arrested when he went to Brahmanbaria to lodge a case against the police.[83] The

incident of police torture on Ebadullah for lodging a criminal suit against the Officer-in-Charge of Salla police station in Sylhet clearly demonstrated how vulnerable the complainants were. In this case the complainant was brutally assaulted by the police in front of the very court where the hearing took place. According to a *Naobelal* report, this incident created great resentment among the people in and around Sunamganj subdivision.[84] In fact, reports of police torture in custody after arrests resulting sometimes in death were not uncommon. One such incident that happened as a result of merciless beatings by the police of a suspect in a dacoity case created an uproar in the province and 'gave rise to violent public comments'. Even the Inspector-General of Police expressed his worries to the Superintendent of Police of Mymensingh about the serious nature of the incident.[85]

Azan reported on 7 May 1953 yet another incident that happened on 6 May in Rangunia police station in Chittagong district in which an assistant sub-inspector of police caused death to a person by striking him with his *danda* (truncheon) while the former tried to escape arrest. When three people related to the deceased went to the police station to lodge a case against the assistant sub-inspector they were arrested.[86] This kind of 'rash and negligent' act on the part of the police drew harsh comments from the executives who conducted the judicial enquiry into the incident.[87]

Occasionally, police violence found its way into the prisons as well. A dramatic illustration of this was an incident that took place in the *Khapra* ward of Rajshahi district jail on 24 April 1950 when the police opened fire on the political detainees and the activists of the peasant uprisings of the preceding years and killed seven of them and injured many others.[88]

It was quite difficult for the victims of police atrocities to seek justice defying 'all obstacles put in the way'. In fact, people were too demoralised even to lodge complaints against the police because of familiar police brutalities that used to follow the complaints. Even then the people dared to bring cases against the police for various crimes perpetrated on

them. The following table might give an impression about the extent and nature of police atrocities against the people of East Bengal.

TABLE 7.2

Year-wise breakdown of criminal cases brought against the police in East Bengal between 1948-1953.

Year	Allegation of Torture	Extortion	Bribery	Assault/ Wrongful Confinement
1948	14	33	94	193
1949	22	75	112	216
1950	11	44	61	276
1951	19	40	93	173
1952	19	48	45	215
1953	33	56	37	205

[Source: Report on the Police Administration of the Province of East Bengal, for the Years 1948-1953. East Bengal Government Press, Dacca.]

Obviously, many cases went unreported. Not only the poor peasants of East Bengal, most of whom did not dare report against the arbitrary and excessive use of force by the police, sometimes even people with social and professional standing felt too scared to seek justice against police oppression. In an incident that led to a clash between the police and railwaymen at Chandpur on 27 March 1949, the doctor, who attended the injured and later was himself assaulted by the police, 'refused to make any statement' against the police. He feared that such an act would have endangered the lives of his family members.[89] The fear of harassment and victimisation of those who dared to

report or depose against police personnel was even noted in the Police Committee Report of 1953.[90]

For many in East Bengal silence became the language of coping with police violence. But silence was not total, nor was it all pervasive. When maintenance of public order had become synonymous with a vindictive spirit of police persecution the latter undermined their own legitimacy in the eyes of the people. On many occasions police became targets of mass vendetta. 'Coercion was both a deterrent and a stimulant of protest. It aroused fear but it also provoked anger among the people'.[91] East Bengal social scene was no different. As the elements of feudal power, supported by people donning uniforms and insignia bearing the sanction of the state power, continued to oppress the weaker sections of society, they also provoked short-lived, violent and collective resistance against 'excessive', 'unfair' and 'unjust' use of force by state agencies.

IV

Theoretically, there was scope for the people to seek redress from any high handedness or arbitrary, unjust and illegal actions of any public servants, be they members of the police force or civil service. But in the social context of East Bengal this scope was beyond the reach of most of the people. Going to court was an expensive affair and moreover litigations meant a lengthy process involving frequent absence from home of the adult male member or members for the courts were in district or sub-divisional headquarters. Bad communications, lack of boarding facilities in the small towns and unfamiliar life in the towns dampened the immediate anger of many who had been outraged by the police violence. As a result, seeking justice for transgressions of rights by the law enforcing authorities became the privilege of the rural well-to-do (though this does not mean that justice was always done to even this group).

It was through telegrams, petitions, memoranda, delegations and sometimes newspapers and public meetings that the affected vented their complaints to higher authorities. These liberal forms of protest were again available primarily to the rural elites. After the Sirajganj shooting the *Pakistan Observer* reported that 'the leading persons of Kazipur' have wired to the authorities protesting against alleged high handedness of the police.[92] Many such protests clearly signalled a lack of confidence in the police as the aggrieved people would often demand non-police or even, non-official enquiry into police atrocities. Official enquiries were thought to be so partisan that the people quite often rejected them altogether.

Protest as an expression of conflict in response to police excesses and atrocities took different forms. Quite often violent means were adopted to defend personal and collective rights of the people if these were threatened and/or violated by the members of the law enforcing agencies.

Life in East Bengal, especially in the countryside, was organised around traditional social norms which at times led to violent conflicts with the activities of the agents of the state, perceived to be a distant and outside entity by the masses of the rural people. On such occasions the villagers temporarily reversed the relationship that existed between the police and themselves. One element which played a role in the reversal was the villagers' notion of honour and dignity which were themselves influenced by their perception of tradition.[93] The incident, at Gabtoli Bazar in Mymensingh on 8 April 1953, when an O.C. along with some members of the rural police were assaulted, originated from an injured sense of prestige of 'the accused number one', a President of the Union Board. On the occasion of *Astami Snan* (a ritual bath on the second day of Durga Puja), a *mela* (fair), used to be held at a place about a mile from Gabtoli *Bazar*. But a year before the incident took place the President of the Union Board shifted the venue of the *mela* 'by exercising his influence' from the original place to Gabtoli *Bazar*. As a consequence of this shifting there was 'riot between the President of the Union Board's party and his opponents' and two murders were committed. As a result no *mela* was allowed that year by the government, resulting in the disappointment and annoyance of

the President of the Union Board and his men. The Superintendent of Police observed that 'the President of the Union Board's position was also undermined before his men' and thus injured 'he wanted to take revenge' against the Officer-in-Charge of the *thana* who stopped the *mela* from being held.[94] Abdus Shahid mentioned the anger of the people and the volunteers in Bakpur Surjamukhi *mela* in Barisal district in early 1948 when the *daroga* and his constables defied the order of the village volunteers of the *mela* by crossing the bamboo bridge which was prohibited from use during the *mela*. Shahid recalled that as a result of this blatant disregard of the orders of the volunteers, people in thousands encircled the police camp in the *mela*. The prestige of the village volunteers thus seen to be undermined by the police led to the intensification of anger of the people.[95]

On many occasions the rural people resisted the police from a sense of what was 'right' and 'just'. When the police were on the 'wrong' side they faced a determined, though often short-lived, resistance from the people. Resistance to arrests and attempts to rescue arrested persons from the custody of the police provide interesting material for any attempt to understand the nature of the 'legitimacy' of the law enforcing authority in the eyes of the people.

In the Shyam Nagar incident on 10 April 1948, in the opinion of the memorialists, when some of the villagers were 'wrongfully confined' by the police and detained in the camp, some people from the detainees' own village came to their rescue.[96] In another incident when the people found out at Pukra in Faridpur district that a widow's safety and honour were at stake, the villagers decided to protect her 'and they did [so] by chasing the police party'.[97] The *Pakistan Observer* reported on 14 September 1949 that on 11 September 'the Police party had gone to the village of Habiganj in Sylhet district to arrest an alleged absconder. On arrival they were attacked by a crowd of villagers'.[98]

On many occasions conflict arose between the police and the people from a contrary understanding and interpretation of legality. On 16 March 1954 the ASI of Faridpur police

station in Pabna district stated in his FIR that after arresting an accused the police were faced with resistance from the people who gathered 'unlawfully' and attacked the police party to forcibly 'free' the arrested. The ASI told 'the mob' that they had followed the law in arresting the accused but 'the mob' paid no heed.[99] Here the police notion of legality and the people's notion of the same were opposite to each other and around this opposition a battle took place.

These kind of conflicts were of frequent occurrence. On 20 October 1951, at Auspara in Sylhet district one arrested person was rescued by villagers numbering about one hundred and armed with 'deadly weapons'. They injured six policemen and forcibly rescued the arrested from the police.[100] Popular anger against all that 'constituted and symbolized' police power was evident in the incident at Koyachhara tea garden on 16 October 1949. After the arrest of their 'leader' the *coolies* armed with 'deadly weapons' and forming and 'unlawful assembly' attacked the police party and attempted to rescue the arrested person and also to snatch away the government muskets from police.[101] In another incident on 2 July 1948 at Chowgacha in Jessore district the angry crowd 'made an attack' on the police outpost hurling brickbats following a scuffle between a policeman and some members of the public that resulted in the arrest of some of them.[102] In fact, the people in the rural areas occasionally succeeded in forcibly rescuing the arrested persons. In 1948 there were seven such cases of forcible rescue by the people from the custody of the police. The same number of arrested were rescued in 1949. But the figure jumped in 1950 and remained almost steady till 1953 as the following table will show.

TABLE 7.3
Year-wise breakdown of cases of forcible rescue from police custody in East Bengal

Year	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
No. of persons	7	7	40	45	27	35

[Source: Report on the Police Administration of the Province of East Bengal, for the years 1948-1953, East Bengal Government Press, Dacca.]

This trend suggests the declining legitimacy of the police in effecting arrests for 'crimes' which the people refused to accept. The extent of popular antipathy to all that constituted the regime of 'discipline and punish' is evident from the number of 'escapes' from police custody also.

Confinement is perhaps universally disliked but in the case of East Bengal society the prospect of quick and fair trial was rare. Cases involved lengthy proceedings, which was regularly resented by the Inspectors-General of Police.[103] Unhealthy, inhuman conditions, lack of accommodation, regular tyrannies and brutalities that were associated with prison life made prison and police custody unacceptable to the convicts and prisoners awaiting trial.[104]

'Police stations, instead of becoming a place of refuge and help for the oppressed and the poor', complained a Muslim League MLA, 'have become centres of oppression and terror'.[105] Perhaps for all these reasons reinforced by the vast member of the society's attitude to the police and police justice the escapees from police custody were quite acceptable to the community. In fact, on many occasions even by the measure of the law of the land the 'accused' were innocent. We have so far no cases - in the early years of East Bengal - of people handing an 'escapee' over to the police. What led occasionally to their rearrests was the agility of the rural police and their informers - people mostly hated by the lower orders in the villages. Let us now look at the number of police escapees to have an indication of the magnitude of defiance of the system.

TABLE 7.4

Year-wise breakdown of no. of escapees from the prison and police custody in East Bengal between 1948-53

Year	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
No. of escapees	85	100	80	86	60	48

[Source: Report on the Police Administration of the Province of East Bengal, for the years 1948-1953, East Bengal Government Press, Dacca.]

These are obviously instances of resistance offered within the arena of confinement organised and supervised by the police. The collective, however defined, outside the custodial world of the police is conspicuous by its absence from the actions that made escapes possible. There were instances of resistance organised individually or collectively within the four walls of the prisons or lock-ups that led to escape. But the 'community' is very much present in some other instances of resistance to the police. The Police Report of 1948 observed that in discharging public duties the police had to face 'numerous attacks'. There were as many as 131 cases of assault on the police resulting in the death of one constable and injuries to 232 officers and men of whom 11 were serious.[106] Atrocity, humiliation and coercion - combined to give expression to police *zulum* - were now turned against them. Some constables were speared, killed and buried at Nachol in Rajshahi by the enraged *Santhals*, so that no trace of them was left behind. The *daroga*, whom we have met in Chapter 5, who was assaulted by the *nankar* peasants one night for allegedly gratifying his lust on peasant women, was subjected, according to Bhattacharya, to a combination of anger and revengeful feeling that had accumulated over time.[107]

The act of taking the law into one's own hands was also a measure of the want of confidence in law enforcement agencies of the state. For the people who were involved in taking revenge against police personnel it could also mean that the liberal democratic

mechanisms of law and justice failed to replace the pre-existing norms and practice of power which remained real to both the police and the people. In this circumstance coercion could only generate resistance. This phenomenon was ruefully recognised by an Inspector-General of Police when he wrote that 'For any opposition from the side of police in exercise of their lawful authority, the people build up a psychological resistance against them' and if the actions were directed against a group or a large section of people, the feelings of the people were likely to be roused against the police for enforcing the law 'even within the strictly constituted lines of authority'.[108] But the 'constituted lines of authority' remained hazy and complex both to the people and to a large section of the constabulary and the officers. In 1949 the Inspector-General of Police observed that cases of assault on the police had increased. In all there were 155 cases of assault on the police in 1949, resulting in injuries to 317 officers and men of whom 13 received serious injuries and two proved fatal.[109] The trend continued. There were 151 cases of assault on the police resulting in the murder of one sub-inspector and three constables and 181 officers and men were injured of whom five were serious in 1950. The Inspector-General of Police admitted that 'assault on the police was on the increase' in that year too.[110] There were one hundred and eleven cases of assault on police resulting in serious injuries to eight officers and men in 1951, but in 1952 the situation further deteriorated. 'There were however more assaults on the police than in 1951', commented the Inspector-General of Police.[111] In 1953 the total number of assaults on the police was 112, including the death of two and serious injury of five officers and men.[112]

This trend of unabated acts of assault on the members of the law and order agency of the state proved that the arbitrary, coercive, partisan practice of the former did not go unchallenged, that police power was often met with 'people power', however fragile and short-lived. Through their actions the people who defied police power constantly displayed a notion of 'community' which was at variance and often in conflict with the juridical notions of the state. The sudden expressions of solidarity among the rural masses on the presupposition that there already exist affinal bonds which then became a 'natural' premise for collective action against the police, were an instance of this

phenomenon.[113] In many cases of resistance to police what constituted the solidarity among the people against the agencies of external domination, especially the various law and order agencies, was their notion of 'a community based on the [so called] primordial loyalties of religion, habitat, kinship' as has been observed by Chakrabarty in his discussion of the jute workers' protests in Bengal. For the peasantry of East Bengal it is even more clearly evident.[114]

On 20 October 1951 at village Auspara in Sylhet district police arrested Helal Uddin. 'His mother, brother and sister came out immediately and offered resistance to the police'; the Enquiry Report adds, 'they offered resistance to the police'. They raised hue and cry, calling for help from the neighbours... On hearing the incessant cries of Helal Uddin and his relations a large number of villagers ... advanced towards the police party.'[115] Again 'responding to a cry of the arrested', wrote the Superintendent of Police of Faridpur on the incident on 4 November 1949 at Hossainpur in Faridpur district, '18 persons, all kin and neighbours, attacked the *daroga* and the constable with deadly weapons'.[116] In another incident at Sultanpur in Sylhet, hearing the alarm of an arrested person, his sister and mother came out and resisted the police. The sister came out armed with an iron rod and dealt a blow on the head of the constable. 'There was a great row and many people including women and children, about 150 to 200 in all, gathered and rescued the arrested'.[117]

The loyalties of kinship (real and imaginary) were so strong in these instances of resistance that even women and children also found a place in the state documents. In fact, women took quite an active part in resisting arrests of the male members of the family and sometimes of the village. In one case in Narail in Jessore district an old woman who happened to be the grandmother of the accused, closed the door when the police turned up, and helped her grandson to flee.[118] Women often made use of inviolable customary practices in order to protect the accused from being arrested. In one such case a score of women were standing at the verandah of the hut where 'a proclaimed offender' took shelter in order to avoid arrest and the sub-inspector of police

was resisted from entering the hut on the false plea that a woman had given birth to a child in the hut making the place 'impure' and thus inaccessible to male entry. At times the solidarity against police action cut across religious differences in a society where religion is often thought to have sharply polarised the Hindus and the Muslims. On 12 April 1948 a Muslim 'offender' was protected by a Hindu widow by offering the former a safe shelter against police pursuit.[119]

Faced with the resistance of kin groups, neighbours, co-residents of the same habitat, the state experienced real difficulties in pursuing its own goals. 'In the dacoity cases it is only the local people who could be competent witnesses', wrote a SDO to the DC Sylhet on the prospects of instituting cases against the peasant activists on 6 September 1949 'but the accused being their kith and kin', doubted the SDO, 'sufficient evidence may not be forthcoming'.[120] In this instance the state was confronted with its own limits of coercion. The identification of collectivity among the struggling peasants by 'primordial' sentiments in some areas in Sylhet set the limit for the coercive power of the state. This was even recognised by its own functionaries.

Indeed, the very presence of police officers intensified a conflict situation. In the earlier mentioned incident at Chardigaldi, 'the very sight of police irritated the excited and rowdy mob'.[121] 'Trouble arose', wrote an enquiring officer on the use of fire-arms at Dhamrai on 22 January 1952, 'after the arrival of said police party'.[122] Any agency related to the police had a similar fate. 'The inimical attitude sometimes of the public towards the Government Reporters is well known', wrote the memorialists, 'they are taken for IB (Intelligence Branch) officers and all filthy abuses, jeers, and vituperation are showered upon them. They become targets for direct attack and criticism'.[123] Indeed, the police informers lived in peril of popular retribution.

On many occasions the 'mob' involved in private dispute changed their common object as soon as the police arrived. On 19 June 1949 the police party intervened to stop two groups fighting at Baidyer Bazar but this invited attack by both groups on the police.[124]

In another conflict between two villages in Mymensingh district on 12 April 1948, the police intervened only to invite determined attack from both.[125] On occasions when the supporters of the Muslim League and the United Front clashed with each other during the campaign for the general election, the police intervened 'to maintain peace and order'; then the target of the 'unruly mob' shifted and attacked the police party.[126]

The everyday oppression which the police carried out alienated them from the people. On any pretext the anger of the people fell on them. Sometimes the conflict was carried beyond the immediate issue. Since partition Independence Day Tournaments were held in which the police participated in order to create 'an atmosphere of goodwill and fellow feeling between the police and the public'.[127] But on 14 August 1951 'wide spread lawlessness broke out in the town of Sylhet on the Pakistan National Day. The incident originated from a football match'.[128] The Karimganj correspondent of the newspaper reported that 'on August 14 a football match was arranged there in connection with Independence Day celebrations between the Police team and the Rest of Sylhet. Some players of the Police team ... wrongfully attacked some players of the Rest of Sylhet which was disliked by the public ... Objections were raised from the public against the offending players. The situations soon became grave and the police made indiscriminate ..... charge on members of the public. ... A clash between the police and the public ensued'. The government issued a press note on 15 August in which it said that, the Football match 'Police-vs-Rest' had to be abandoned as a result of rowdyism. There was an unseemly fracas between the protagonists of the two sides. The quarrel was unfortunately carried beyond the play ground and a number of persons received injuries, five of them serious'.[129] The Press Note that followed the incident mentioned that a curfew was imposed on that night and prohibited the assembly of five or more persons for one week in Sylhet.

On 17 September of the same year in the final of the Amulya Memorial Football Competition there was a clash between the police team and the team of the Merchant's club of Barisal. The clash eventually involved the public and the police. The District

Magistrate strongly intervened and took action against the police personnel responsible for the trouble. In a note to the Commissioner of Dhaka Division, he wrote that 'it will be construed in various quarters ... as a 'victory' of the townspeople over the police'.[130] The police and the public clashed again in Noakhali football field.[131] The government was concerned at 'the growing number of such clashes between the police and the public at football matches'.[132] In view of the situation the government considered stopping the police from playing matches with the public to avoid 'all chance of conflict'. The government was worried at the continuous 'criticism in the Press and from the political platform for every indiscretion committed by an individual or few individuals during a sporting event'.[133] A similar incident took place on Bogra Football Ground in August 1953. As a result twenty one policemen and twelve members of the public were injured.[134]

The District Magistrate of Barisal feared that the causes of the clash were 'deep-rooted'.[135] The roots went far beyond the play ground. All the clashes turned out to be an enactment of minor rebellion, though short-lived by the people against the law and order agency. What were playful competitions between the police and the people within the boundary of non-antagonistic rules of the game changed codes in course of the game and turned out to be violent and antagonistic. Tension rose so much in the everyday life of the community that it took the slightest provocation to spread violence beyond the confines of the play ground. A solidarity of players, spectators, and a large section of the townspeople emerged against the police force. In Sylhet the crowd were reported to have attacked the car of the superintendent of police as the conflict spread and grew larger in size. Attacks took place far away from the place of conflict. On the Sylhet incident the Karimganj correspondent reported that two policemen on duty on the police-point at Bandar *bazar* were also attacked following the conflict in the football field.[136] Hence the collective expressed itself by its opposition to the police and whatever stood as signs of police power.

Sometimes this 'unity' of the people against the police drew its legitimacy from a popular interpretation of political independence. In an incident of Rajoir in Faridpur when the peasants attacked the police to release arrested persons, one of the attackers allegedly said that the police in Pakistan had no power to arrest a man in an assault case. No doubt the law of the land did not bear out this supposition but that was what gave the angry peasants the 'right' to attack the police party.

Predictably, all the transient resistance of the people to police aggression created contexts for the state to strengthen and expand the police force in order to meet fresh challenges to its own power. Police power, thus, received sustenance from the sporadic, dispersed, short-lived 'flashes of anger' of the people. However for the political elite running the government in East Bengal, police actions against the people introduced tensions that gradually corroded the basis of their own unity.

V

The importance of the policeman was adequately recognised by the ruling elite in East Bengal. They seldom missed any opportunity to eulogise the services supposedly rendered by the police to nation-building. The Prime Minister, in an address to the police officials, defined their job as 'to hold the balance between man and man, between parties and parties, between all classes of citizens'137, and contrary to the colonial administrator's low opinion of the police, the Muslim League government claimed to have been 'actuated by sincere sympathy for the police force'. The ruling elite believed that they 'could not have industrial development, agricultural advancement, educational progress' without the hard work done by the policemen. Popular perception that the policemen were 'concerned only with criminals' was discarded by the ruling elite, instead the police were assigned the task of 'handling the people' in order to achieve an orderly society.138

The Prime Minister in a speech set the ideal for the police. 'By fostering a general respect for law and order', he said, 'we shall be able to build Pakistan on the ideals which the founder cherished so dearly, namely - a Pakistan where there would be no injustice, no distinction between man and man, when it comes to offer any protection to its citizens, and that the Government will always be guided by a sense of fair play and render help to those who need it and put down those who oppress the weak and the down-trodden'.[139] Obviously the police were assigned an important role in this scenario. The PM also stressed the neutrality of police in nation-building and state-building activities.

But the gap between officially stated 'ideals' and actual conduct of the police was particularly great. The consequence of this was not only resented by a large section of the people; the Muslim League in fact reaped the bitter harvest of the misdeeds of the force. To the people of East Bengal the police remained a 'spectacle of excess' as they were during the Raj. 'The very name police', according to a Member of the Constituent Assembly, 'was a terror to the people in the countryside'.[140] In fact, all through the rule of the Muslim league in East Bengal the police-people relation was a sore point for the administration. One of the terms of reference of the East Bengal Police Committee which was appointed by the Governor of the Province on 23 August 1949, was to examine the relationship of the police and the public and to suggest ways to 'bring it into accord with modern conditions'.[141] For the Muslim League this was to remain an unattainable ideal till their last day in power.

Occasionally the Prime Minister urged the higher police officials to create an atmosphere amongst the subordinate staff of cooperation with the public.[142] He felt that the general complaint of the public was against the lower ranks and asked the latter on occasions to stop 'chastising', 'abusing' and 'maltreating' the public[143] and to avoid 'harsh treatment and method' towards the people. The Prime Minister was aware that the word 'Police was synonymous with zulum'.

Many Muslim League leaders and activists were concerned about the atrocities that the members of the force time and again unleashed on the people. Many of them perceived these actions as 'illegal and unjust'. Quite often they brought it to the notice of the government at Dhaka. They sent telegrams, wrote memoranda, and at times personally communicated it to the higher bureaucrats. As political leaders and activists of the ruling party on many occasions they acted as bridges between the government and the people. In a telegram as early as 22 December 1947, the MLA from Naogaon in Rajshahi informed the Home Minister of police atrocities in Ramnagar. He solicited the Home Minister's intervention and relief for the victims of 'police vandalism'.[144] Giasuddin Pathan, a prominent Muslim league MLA and later a Minister, complained to the government about police atrocities in some villages of Mymensingh.[145] In another telegram the Secretary of Teligati Union Muslim League of Netrokona sub-division in Mymensingh district informed the Prime Minister's secretariat on 18 June 1949 of police atrocities in villages Karatia, Bijoypur, Hatiar, Tenga Bali Kandi, Teligati in Atpara police station of Netrokona sub-division. He also solicited 'immediate preventative steps'.[146] Sometime Parliamentary Secretaries forwarded to the Prime Minister or the Minister concerned the grievances of the people against police action. The information of police atrocities at Gurudaspur of Rajshahi prompted a parliamentary secretary to ask for 'immediate judicial enquiry into the matter'.[147] Sometimes incidents of police atrocities were reported to the District Officers for enquiry and action.

Instances of such attempts by individual Muslim League leaders to rectify police discipline and redress suffering of the people are many. Sporadic and arbitrary displays of coercive power by the police were perceived by many activists and leaders of the Muslim League as provoking hostility towards the Government and as posing serious threats to the rule of the Muslim League. They feared that police excesses contributed to the erosion of Muslim League popularity in the province. Sometimes individual initiative within the framework of the government was deemed inadequate to the need. Local level Muslim League leaders held public meetings and condemned the corruption and excesses by officers and members of the force. In one such meeting held in Sylhet on 19 November

1947 and presided over by the General Secretary of Assam Provincial Muslim League, the following resolution was adopted: 'The public of Sylhet puts on record its profound resentment and severe condemnation against the nepotism, favouritism, high-handedness and misbehaviour of the Superintendent of Police of Sylhet. The meeting further demands of the Government of Eastern Pakistan to cause immediate removal of the officer from the district'.[148] There were other such meetings all over the province.

Some members of the Muslim League carried the criticism of the police right inside the Assembly. To many of them it appeared that the administration of the police department was far from satisfactory. One member thought that 'the police officers seemed to have achieved personal independence after the partition'. He resented at all those instances of officers of the police stations flouting the orders of the magistrates allegedly with impunity. This scandalous state of things, it is believed, needed immediate government attention.[149] In fact, many League members from time to time condemned police excesses and gave contrary views to the necessity of granting more money under Police Head in the budget.[150] Some members of the League in the Assembly time and again mentioned that the relations between the police and the people were not at all amicable.[151]

Some of them even tried to improve the situation. In a note to the Deputy Secretary of the Home Department the Inspector-General of Police mentioned that 'Mr Ahad, MLA, saw me over the case and expressed his anxiety for a compromise' as he thought 'harmonious relations between the police and the public was essential'.[152] The police authorities responded to such Muslim League criticism in the Assembly by adopting the traditional measures of strengthening and increasing the number of supervisory staff; which only added to the coercive strength of the force. In response to the request, earlier cited, the Inspector-General of Police took steps to post a sub-divisional police officer at Satkhira for better supervision of the police against whom the affected people and the MLA complained of atrocities.[153]

The police officials always resented interference of outsiders, including Muslim League MLAs and Ministers, in their affairs. The Police Committee in its recommendation especially discouraged this practice.[154] In the conference of the Inspectors General it was agreed that in the interest of the police discipline there should definitely have been no extra departmental interference in matters of punishment and promotion of the police.[155] Thus the police favoured and insisted on exclusivity and non-interference from the representatives of the public.

Even when it was found by departmental and judicial enquiries that police actions were unjustified, the finding was not made public and popular participation in enquiries relating to police actions was never encouraged. When the government intended to declare the police firing at Noai Mondol *beel* on 29 December 1951 unjustified, a higher bureaucrat differed with the government decision and referred to the practice of the Raj in this regard. 'No order is issued', reminded the bureaucrat, 'when the firing is considered to be unjustified'. This advice was accepted and followed by the government.[156] As a result 'sometime', as the Commissioner of Chittagong Division noted, 'circumstances were occasionally exaggerated to justify police firing'.

There was a general tendency in the police department to 'protect its officers and men', and sometimes this tendency was carried to the extreme of supporting a subordinate officer at all costs, even when he was obviously at fault.[157] When the police constables at Lauta Bahadurpur police camp in Sylhet were all transferred from the camp for their alleged indiscriminate torture of the villagers, the Superintendent of Police was unhappy about the decision and resented that this action by higher authorities as it had a dampening effect on the morale of the force. This perception of the superintending officials influenced their attitude in respect of taking the members of the force to task for any act of indiscretion. In fact, a Muslim League MLA complained against the 'ruffled feeling of higher officers when complaints were made against individual policemen.'[158] The Prime Minister also took note of this tendency of shielding the subordinates by the superiors 'as a matter of routine', though he admitted that the police 'always got the

backing of the Government'. He appealed to the police to judge each case 'on its own merit'. But instead of taking the initiative to stop this practice the Prime Minister happily depended on the Deputy Inspectors-General of Police to 'take personal interest in this respect' so that this particular 'evil' would be eradicated.[159]

Due to the lack of popular control over the force, the relation between the people and the police deteriorated speedily. People's doubts and suspicions about the government, already instilled during the Raj, continued to exist. A number of the Muslim League MLAs time and again appealed to the government to work towards changing the 'old bureaucratic traditions' of the police and emphasised the need to overhaul the entire system thoroughly.[160] But nothing happened which could claim to have been initiated by the spirit of nationalism. As a result many Muslim League activists lost interest in reforming the police. A glaring example of the lack of public interest in police affairs was evident in the response of the MLAs and MCAs to the questionnaire sent by the Police Committee. Only three out of forty four MCAs and twenty out of one hundred and sixty one MLAs who received the copies of the questionnaire 'cared to send in their replies'. This indifference of the elected representatives of the people towards reforming the police was considered 'most deplorable' by the Police Committee.[161]

This was only the reflection of the extent of alienation of the force from the society. But it was not only the police who were alienated, the Muslim League government, along with it, lost popular support for the misdeeds of the force.

As was the case before political independence, people continued to look upon the police as representing the government.[162] The 'symbol of government in the rural areas', according to a senior official in Bangladesh as late as 1977, 'continues to be the police'.[163] This aspect of the relationship was highlighted by a Muslim League MLA. While emphasising the importance of the discipline of the force, he said that 'they (the Police) will always discredit the Government and give them a bad name, and entail a serious trouble for the Government'.[164] An Opposition politician held the view that so far

as the masses were concerned the Government meant the Police and the *thana* which was the backbone of the government.[165] In fact, the importance of the police force for the 'prestige of the government' was adequately stressed in the conference of the Inspectors-General of Police. While emphasising the importance of the force, the conference resolved that 'if the police force failed, the whole administration would fail with it'.[166]

Thus in the true tradition of the Raj the bureaucrats and the members of the ruling elite relied on the force for the maintenance of 'law and order' - a shorthand for class rule. In the experience of the people the 'old prejudice' of linking the government and the police flared up every time the masses came into direct conflict with the force. As a result the Muslim League, as the government party, suffered continual erosion of legitimacy in the eyes of the people. On 23 December 1947, in a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Amir Ali of village Sarifganj of Mymensing district expressed bewilderment at police behaviour when he wrote that 'repressions of police officers are inconceivable in these days of democracy and popular freedom and are only reminiscent of oppression perpetrated during the British Raj'. To this man, as to many of his compatriots, Pakistan was rendered meaningless by the 'high handedness of the police'.[167] To the memorialists of Nawabganj in Dhaka district the police conduct 'humiliated Pakistan itself in the eye of the people'.[168]

In fact, as we have stated earlier, the 'notion of Pakistan' did not go well with a police force that had been created and bequeathed to the new nation by the Raj. Every excess perpetrated by the police on the people reduced the euphoria born of political independence. Abdullah Sharif of Jessore, in his proposed model of the state, suggested the abolition of the police force which he termed 'superfluous' and incompatible with the national government based on 'democratic ideas, and Islamic spirit'. He suggested, after cataloguing all the evils of the police, conversion of the force to National Guards with the assurance of 'respect' for 'the voices of public opinion'.[169]

The police bureaucrats were not unaware of this fact. The Inspector-General of Police expressed his doubt if police officers fully realised their responsibility in the 'new set-up'. He reminded them that 'He who can secure the object in view by persuasion is a more useful officer than his comrade who relies too much on the assertion of his authority and thereby runs the risk of seeing that authority challenged'. The use of force, Inspector-General of Police reminded, was always followed by complaints and recriminations which embittered the relations between the police and the public.[170] Time and again the stress was laid on the persuasive power of the force by the members of the ruling party and the higher police bureaucrats. The Prime Minister emphasised a 'change of outlook' of the force. He stressed that 'unless a change could be effected in the outlook under which the police is to be regarded as friends, the objective to set up an ideal administration would not be attained'.[171] He demanded initiative from the police in this respect.

But the initiative was lacking. The police could not free themselves from the influence of the Raj as was evident in the assertion of the policemen in an incident of conflict with the people at Cox's Bazar on 3 September 1947. While carrying on 'wanton oppression' of the people the police allegedly shouted: '*shalara*, Pakistan has not yet been achieved, the British police still exist'.[172] This self-image of the rank and file in the police force continued to linger. Most of the higher officials in the force also continued to model themselves on the authoritarian practice of the Raj and always guarded their colonial heritage tenaciously. To a proposal by the Sylhet municipality for a piece of land in the Sylhet Sadar *thana* compound for erection of a memorial to *shahid* Alkas the Inspector-General of Police responded by saying that it was 'undesirable to encourage the erection of a memorial in the Thana compound for a victim of police firing'.[173] Alkas was shot by the police in the last days of the Raj on 24 April 1947 when a procession of the civil resisters proceeded towards the Sylhet *Sadar* police station. 'This one incident' according to Mahmud Ali, General Secretary of Assam Muslim League, 'was a turning point in the movement' to join with Pakistan.[174] And thus Alkas became a martyr to the cause of Pakistan. 'In the eyes of the public it was a national cause', noted the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, 'and Alkas was declared to have died [the] death of [a]

shahid'. The Deputy Inspector-General failed to see the cause of the people and thus isolated the police from sharing the 'glory of the cause' for which Alkas died. The gap between nationalist spirit and colonial rule as embodied in the coercive police continued to exist, though the nationalists were in control of the state. Even to a higher police bureaucrat it was 'extremely undesirable' to erect a memorial of a nationalist *shahid* in the compound of a police station of an independent state.[175]

Thus Pakistani nationalism failed to legitimise the police force on whom it largely relied to build the nation and protect the state. This, along with many other factors, contributed to the erosion of liberalism in state practice during the years of Muslim League rule in East Bengal. As a result the Muslim League, the political vehicle of nation building efforts, was alienated from the people much sooner than many political observers had anticipated.

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CHAPTER 8

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION: THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND ITS RULE

I

In his characteristically arrogant style, Jinnah once dismissed the contribution of the Muslim League in achieving Pakistan. 'Don't talk to me about the Muslim League,' he said in response to a question, 'I and my stenographer created Pakistan'[1] This uncharitable comment came from a man who led the League with an absolute mandate from its members. Apart from the element of self-congratulation that it obviously contained, the statement also undermined the importance of the organisation, and slighted the sacrifice that others had made in the struggle for Pakistan.

Recognizably an overstatement, Jinnah's remark nevertheless contained a grain of truth. While he had emerged as the 'sole spokesman'[2] for the League and the Muslims in the 1940s, it was also true that the League had never been a mass-based organisation in the same way as the Congress had been. Moreover, Pakistan's top leaders had no contact with the anti-colonial movement in Asia; neither did they take part in it nor had they, as Kamruddin Ahmad contends, ever tried to understand it.[3] As a result the League organisation was never steeled through participation in anti-imperialist struggles, as was the case with the Congress. Hence its relation with the masses was not based on organisational linkages; what bestowed on the League the authority to speak for Indian Muslims was perhaps the political context of the 1930s and 40s, and the growing perception of Muslims that the Hindus were their main oppressors.

Till 1943 there was almost no provincial and district level organisation of the Muslim League in Bengal.[4] A branch office of the Provincial Muslim League was set up only on 9

April 1944, at 150 Mogultooly, Dhaka.[5] In fact, the Dhaka District Muslim League was confined within the precincts of the 'Nawab Bari' (House of the Nawabs). 'Intrigues, faction-fights, takeover bids and knife-thrusts', in the words of Tinker, were the salient features of the Bengal Muslim League before independence.[6] The malaise in the organisation of the League not only continued after independence, but deteriorated considerably since then, seriously affecting the district, sub-divisional and lower level units. There was an uneasy calm at the organizational level so long as Jinnah was alive, but his death on 11 September 1948, 'released forces within the League which were influential to limit its effectiveness, especially in East Bengal which was taking on', as Ziring believed, 'more and more the appearanceofapolitical battleground'[7]. By the time the League was in power in East Bengal it had developed three factions: the Dhaka or Nazimuddin faction, the Fazlul Huq faction and the Suhrawardy faction. The Dhaka faction was essentially traditional, conservative and represented by the landed (Zamindari) interests. The Suhrawardy faction was mostly 'modernist' in ideology and believed in changing the communal nature of the organisation after Pakistan was achieved. The Fazlul Huq faction was rural, with activists drawn from professional groups. The other small groups belonging to the Assam Muslim League led by Maulana Bhashani also added colour to the already faction-ridden East Bengal Muslim League politics.

After the partition the Nazimuddin faction came to power with the blessings and with help from the central Muslim League leadership.[8] The activists of the League were now divided on the issue of whether or not to open up the Muslim League to the non-Muslim section of the society.[9] In February 1948, in the council session held at Karachi, the All India Muslim League was divided into two separate organisations: the Pakistan Muslim League and the Indian Muslim League. Except for the Muslim League parties in the legislature, the existing structure of the entire organisation was dissolved and all the primary membership stood cancelled. Thus the reorganisation of the League involved fresh enrolment of primary members and the building up of the organisation from primary,

sub-divisional and district levels to the provincial councils, and finally the Pakistan Muslim League council and the working committee.[10]

This decision to 'close the door of the League' on the face of the people was bitterly resented by many League activists. Abul Mansur called this action of the League a 'political crime' entailing some ethical and moral lapses.[11] The somewhat liberal criteria that existed before partition regarding election to various offices and organs within the party were now replaced by strict centralisation of directive and cautious control. This helped those already in control to strengthen their own positions by distributing favours to sections they favoured, thereby weakening oppositional groups in the organisation. It is not surprising that these developments gave rise to serious allegations of discrimination and partisan considerations within the League.[12]

Organising committees at district and sub-divisional levels were nominated by Akram Khan, the President of the Bengal Muslim League at the time of partition, in the first week of May, 1948, and receipt books for enrolment of primary members were distributed to organisers about the same time.[13] This attitude was reflected also in the way candidates were nominated for the District Board election held in Bogra, immediately after partition, where allegedly an anti-League element was given nomination by the Provincial leadership, overlooking 'competent' League activists.[14] By July 1948, the League organisation at the sub-divisional level and below had been constituted. The formation of more than one District League in a single district was reported from several districts; some of them accordingly had to be dissolved: in some other cases, their elections were declared invalid and fresh elections held. The process of reorganisation of the League generated serious dissatisfaction within the party ranks. Some disaffected members sought intervention from the central leadership, but the latter refused to overrule or by-pass the provincial leadership in matters relating to the reorganisation of the League in East Bengal.[15] The power of nomination of district and sub-divisional committees for enrolling primary members and constituting the League Committees at those levels gave the provincial organising committee headed by Akram Khan great scope to exercise

influence over the entire reorganisation process. Distribution of a meagre number of receipt books to these committees for enrolment purposes restricted the size of the party. As Nazma Chowdhury commented: 'The reorganisation policy in a way, demonstrated the limitations of the political style of those in power'-- their inclination toward 'coterie politics' rather than an open competitive style of operation.[16]

The newly formed League, as Ispahani observed, 'unfortunately lacked the enthusiasm, the determination, the discipline, the sacrifice, and above all else, the aim which propelled the All-India Muslim League onward to solidarity and greatness.'[17] The control of the ruling clique over the organisation earned for the party the sobriquet 'Pocket League' from Maulana Bhashani. Similar criticism came from Suhrawardy who called the organisation a 'Sarkari League'(Government League).[18] The internal crisis of the League came out into the open during the Council Session of the Pakistan Muslim League which was held at Dhaka on 18 and 19 June 1949.[19] But the crisis now had reached down to most of the district and sub-division level organisations as well.

Unhappy with the changes occurring within the Muslim League, a large number of activists left the organisation, and, on 26 June, 1949, formed the Awami Muslim League, the Muslim League of the people, under the leadership of Maulana Bhashani.[20] It was a major split, undoubtedly the biggest in the history of the Muslim League, but the party that survived the split failed to ensure unity and solidarity among its members and followers, though it was now more homogeneous than before. The old activists of the Muslim League held a meeting on 21st and 22nd July 1949 at the local Board Hall of north Sylhet. A motion of no confidence in the district and sub-divisional adhoc committees was passed at this meeting and communicated to them. Again on 19 August 1951 a League Workers' Conference was held in Sylhet, attended by many activists in the district and Sub-divisional branches, who expressed their sense of frustration about the provincial leadership. This atmosphere pervaded almost all the branches of the Muslim League all over the province.[21] The League organisation in the province had virtually resolved itself into a chaotic tangle of small factions, 'each attached', as Callard has observed, 'more to

a person or an interest rather than representing a policy'. 'At no stage,' to quote Callard 'has the power of the politicians rested upon solid electoral support.'[22] The only by-election held in a Muslim seat in Tangail, in Mymensingh district, in April, 1949 saw the ruling party defeated. Their response was to postpone all other by-elections in an attempt to forestall any possible opposition in the assembly. The bitter experience of Tangail paralysed the organisation and stopped them from attempting a 'thorough overhauling of policy'.[23]

The absence of by-elections in 34 seats, nearly one fifth of the total membership of the Assembly, also hampered the organisational activities of the local branches.[24] Traditionally what spurred political activities in the provinces was the mobilization around elections. By-elections were generally regarded as the barometer by which the ruling party could measure the degree of popular support they enjoyed. By postponing the elections the EBML deprived itself of this advantage. As a result the district and lower level organisations became indifferent to the public. The political result of the internecine factional fights and bickering for personal gain that went on inside the branches must have been quite frustrating for the rank and file membership. Opportunism became the only means of advancing one's own political status, and the Muslim League now developed a sycophantic political style.

The resulting organisational problems were to become more obvious in the years that followed. In November 1951, for instance, four members of the Assembly from Chittagong resigned because of disagreement with certain government policies affecting the district. They resented the delay and the amount of the compensation fixed by the District Administration for the land acquired by the government in Muradpur in Chittagong district. It was stated that the members upheld the position of Chittagong district and city Muslim League regarding the issue.[25] More defections and resignations took place from the parliamentary party after the police firing on 21 February 1952, as the League government failed to resolve the language issue and resorted to violence instead. Want of discussion within the forums of the organisation, and absence of by-elections, led to

serious inaction in the organisation. A 1953 Secret Report on the Organisation had this to say on organisational problems:

> Except in Sylhet and Noalhali Muslim League activity was hardly perceptible elsewhere; and there too, it was more or less of an internecine character. In Sylhet the League was divided into two rival groups as already reported in the previous fortnight, and so far no effective action has been taken by the provincial Muslim League to bridge this gap. In Noakhali Mr. Abdul Hakim, General Secretary of the DML lost the confidence of the organisation. At a specially convened meeting on the 19th of June a resolution of no-confidence was moved against him and was passed by considerable majority. The DML in Comilla is divided into 3 groups each pulling in a different direction. In Rangpur, the Secretary of the DML Mashiur Rahman and some other MLAs have joined the opposition party and at the same time trying to create their own party within the organisation.

The report pointed out the 'obvious lack of discipline and cohesion' in the organisation.[26]

The District Magistrate of Khulna reported to the chief Secretary the existence of two strong factions in the district Muslim League.[27] The District Magistrate, Barisal also had similar reports to send to the government. The powerful 'student faction', reported the DM, Barisal, was 'apparently not liked at all by the older generation' who had lost power to them.[28] 'All the self-respecting leaders of the DML', wrote one of the 'older generation' leaders of Barisal, 'were under a painful necessity of keeping themselves aloof from the organisation. One coterie Muslim League was formed with some school and college boys so much so that one happened to be the secretary of the Bakherganj [Barisal] District Muslim League'. He further stated that 'the DML...has got a working Committee from which all the MLAs were cautiously excluded'.[29] In fact, the organisation became conspicuous by its inactivity[30] at lower levels, which compelled the Working Committee of the DML, in its meeting of May 1949, to direct all the District, Sub-division, City and Union Committees to activate the organisation and to call meetings more frequently[31]. The situation prevailing in the League sometimes attracted comment from sections of the media sympathetic to the cause of the League. *Morning News*, a Dhaka daily, compared the condition of the League to that of 'a sucked orange', and suggested that a revitalised Muslim League 'with less of the rulers and more of the ruled in it' could successfully perform the task of nation building.[32]

Many district and sub-divisional level activists were worried about the situation in the Party and communicated their feelings to central leaders, sometimes even to the Governor of the Province. The President of the Netrokona Sub-division Muslim League informed the Governor that 'there was no activity in the Muslim League'. He also thought that the provincial leaders were not sufficiently active to revitalize the organisation.[33]. In July 1951, a district level Muslim League leader informed the Governor of the Province that the organisation was 'not working in the villages like the Congress Party'.[34]. On 23 August 1951, Mahmud Ali, the former General Secretary of Assam Muslim League, wrote in *Naobelal* that in the last four years there had been no Muslim League activity in Sylhet. The Convenor of Sylhet ML Adhoc Committee, Myenuddin Ahmad Chowdhury, also resented the gross inactivity of the organisation in the district.[35] 'To many in the country', as Smith has observed, 'the leaders have seemed, in fact, to have clung to power but to have abdicated leadership'.[36] Many supporters of the League were pained to see the condition of their organisation, and expressed their frustration through the media. In a letter to the editor of the *Morning News*, one Akhtar Hossain Joarder of Rajshahi wrote on 17 September 1952 that 'the masses are estranged [from the League] and as such when any public meeting is held the present leaders do not get any audience. We have got League leaders and League Government', he wrote further, 'but no League minded people'[37] Even Akram Khan, the President of the PML, admitted in his letter of resignation before the June 1949 Council Session that the popularity of the League was 'waning rapidly', and people were losing faith in the national organisation. He blamed the 'internal weakness of the organisation' for the unhappy situation of the Muslim League.[38]

'Internal weakness' was a major reason why no party elections were held after the reorganisation process in 1948. The elections which were scheduled in 1951 started taking place towards the end of the year; and this opened a pandora's box of internal conflicts. In some districts and sub-divisions 'parallel Leagues' were formed, so that more than one League executive body was elected. But elections could not be completed in Sylhet, Narayanganj city, Barisal, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna, Comilla, and Dhaka city in time.[39] Internal conflicts and unresolvable differences were among the causes of this

situation. 'The factional struggles in the lower units of the organisation', Nazma Chowdhury has rightly observed, 'reflected the factional conflicts which prevailed in the upper echelons of party leadership.'[40] Deep fissures had now been created in the party; conflicts of personality and power overshadowed the members' allegiance to the organisation.[41] To some extent the state of the party can be assessed from a comment by *Ananda Bazar Patrika* on 20 June 1953: 'The Muslim League which took the reins of Government is now crumbling to pieces. There is no powerful and popular person in its ranks who may solve its internal problem. An institution which is busy about settling its own house in order cannot possibly rule the country in a proper way. In this circumstance the interest of the masses are bound to suffer.'[42]

This lack of a mass base was pointed out by the DM, Khulna, in a Fortnightly Report to the Government on 26 October 1949. According to him mass contact was a thing which was dreaded by the district leadership, and thus no attempt at enrolment of members was being made.[43] As a result 'instead of controlling and directing the party', the leadership did considerable damage to the organisation and lost touch with the people.

The legislative wing of the ML was similarly affected. The general climate of League politics made many of the legislators unresponsive to the expectations of the people. In previous chapters we have given a number of instances of Muslim League MLAs criticising, from time to time, various government policies, in order to make those more pro-people. But most of the time their criticism went unheeded. Some members harped on the bureaucratic nature of the government which, they felt, resembled more the Raj than 'national' government. Failing to reform the organisation and the Government, some of them defected and formed the Awami League Group in the provincial Assembly in February 1952. But most of the League MLAs were seemingly engaged in furthering their own personal ends and the interests of the class they represented. For these activities, they depended more on the civil servants than on the people, 'from whom their roots had been cut off', giving the bureaucrats an opportunity to establish their supremacy in the government.[44] The alienation of the Muslim League leaders from the masses comes out

clearly from the following observation in the East Pakistan Police Committee report: 'Of late, the use of armed police has been considerable as the security measures specially with regard to the Members of the Central and Provincial Government have been intensified'.[45] By now a significant number of the Muslim League leaders had given up their idea of 'Pakistan Revolution' in exchange for bureaucratic and police protection.

II

All the key posts, including those of Secretaries of the East Bengal Secretariat, went to non-Bengalis after independence. There was only one Bengali[46] among the 82 senior officers who opted for Pakistan. Kamruddin Ahmad, a contemporary political activist, observed that the bureaucrats in Pakistan were not only responsible for executing the policy of the government, but also took upon themselves the task of framing the policy.[47] Ziring was even more eloquent in emphasising the importance of the bureaucracy in Pakistan. The East Bengal civil servants, drawn mostly from the Punjab, who knew little about the economic, social and cultural problems of the country,[48] owed their allegiance only to the central executive. 'Behind the facade of the cabinet, stood these permanent Civil Servants, tirelessly and ceaselessly advising the individual ministers as regards legislation and other matters'. In this way, Ziring went on to emphasise, 'the Civil Servants matured virtually all government proposals, both executive and legislative.[49]

Thus the situation was one where the bureaucracy remained the predominant factor in the political processes of the province. It is in this context that one can perhaps appreciate the significance of the *Morning News* editorial on 12 August 1950, in which Mafizuddin Ahmed, East Pakistan's Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation, was applauded for setting 'a courageous example' by holding a Press conference at Dhaka instead of allowing a Permanent Secretary to do the job, as had been the practice in the province. The editorial also exhorted the Minister 'to see that no infringement of their powers and privileges takes place'. It hailed 'the example' as worth emulating by other Ministers.[50]

The provincial bureaucracy was run by a Chief Secretary, an ethnic Punjabi, on whom most of the members of the cabinet, including the Prime Minister were dependent. The Prime Minister also indirectly enhanced the prestige and influence of the Divisional Commissioners by arrogating to himself the Cabinet's power of rejection of any suggestion from the former regarding issues of governance.[51] Kamruddin Ahmad thought that the Chief Minister of East Pakistan 'lacked personality', and that was why he failed to control the bureaucracy.[52] Umar has also highlighted interesting examples to show how it was the Chief Secretary who took most of his important decisions on issues like the Language controversy in the province.[53] Talking to Aziz Ahmed, the Chief Secretary of the province, Taya Zinkin had a feeling that 'his whole attitude was that of a colonial administrator.'[54]

Zinkin also reports that at the mention of the Chief Minister, Nurul Amin, Aziz Ahmed said, 'what can you expect of him? He is an ass and a Bengali.'[55] If this was the attitude of the Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister, which he unhesitatingly expressed to a representative of a foreign press, one can only imagine how less important Muslim League ministers would have fared in the eyes of the bureaucracy. Kamruddin Ahmad quotes Aziz Ahmed as saying 'I am the Government', and the media also from time to time confirmed the self-image of the Chief Secretary in the provincial administration.[56] In fact, there are innumerable instances of the Chief Secretary reprimanding Ministers in the course of the day to day running of administration. The situation reached such an absurd state as to make Kamruddin Ahmad wonder who, between Nurul Amin and Aziz Ahmed, was responsible for the failure of democracy in East Pakistan.[57]

What was happening at the Provincial headquarters of the administration influenced the lower levels of the bureaucracy as well. In the June 1949 Council Session of the ML many councillors complained to their leaders about the 'insults' the District Magistrates and other officers used to hurl at the League members of the districts.[58] But the 'insults' continued almost without interruption from bureaucratic quarters. In a Memorandum on

20 March 1950, submitted to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Sylhet district Muslim Students' Association, the memorialists complained against the 'unbecoming and humiliating behaviour of the DM' towards Qazi Muhibur Rahman, a former councillor of the Assam Provincial Muslim League. The DM had the former arrested 'on personal grounds' allegedly to satisfy his vanity. 'It was too strong a shock for him (Qazi Muhibur Rahman) to stand' and as a result he fell ill inside the jail and later died.[59] The reason for this 'excess', as stated by the memorialists, was that Muhibur Rahman had dared to speak against the DM to the Divisional Commissioner. Complaints also came in from the sub-divisions. The DML Secretary of Rangpur complained to the DM about 'a concrete case of an arrogant Government official [SDO, Nilphamari] who always undermined the prestige of the National Organisation.' Commenting on the complaint,even the Chief Secretary disapproved of the tactless manner in which the officer behaved towards the ML activists in the sub-division.[60]

In May 1949, the Working Committee in its meeting entreated the Government servants to be 'courteous' and 'helpful' to the citizens. The Prime Minister, in the first conference of the Commissioners, emphasised the need for politeness and sympathy in their dealings with others. And he assigned the officers the role of 'guides and friends' to the public.[61] In fact the DMs acted more as guides than as friends to the League. In their Fortnightly Reports they almost regularly appraised and suggested ways to improve the performance of the League branches in the districts. In one such report the District Magistrate of Khulna wrote: 'It is time that the Provincial Muslim League thought (sic) seriously of the future of Muslim League Organisation in the district. It is in the hands of people who are not anxious to maintain the prestige and sustain the popularity of the organisation in the district'. He also suggested a role for the Provincial Leaders in the Report: 'Some provincial League officials should make mass contact and find out the weakness existing at the moment in the working of the present organisation and the impediments that are standing in the way of making the League a really powerful democratic body in the district'. The reason for concern was also spelt out by the DM who proferred this recommendation for 'the interest of not only the local administration

but in the ultimate good of the *dumb nuts masses* of the district'.[62] The elitist attitude expressed in this statement is too obvious to require any comment.

III

The demand for restructuring the bureaucracy had been articulated since the birth of the new nation. As early as September 1947, an important resolution was adopted in the East Pakistan Youth Conference held at Dhaka on 26 September. It stated that activists who had made sacrifices in the struggle for Pakistan, and all those who had deeprooted connections with the soil, were to be recruited to the bureaucracy. For many activists, of course, liberty against foreign rule symbolized the absence of colonial state functionaries, or at least assumption of effective control over them. On 18 November 1947, the speakers in a meeting organised by the Muslim League at the local Muslim Institute, Mymensingh, expressed the opinion that the public should be at liberty to remove any Minister or official whom they thought 'dishonest and inefficient'.[63] The demand for popular control over the bureaucracy was articulated more strongly and regularly by the relatively lower level activists of the League, and their supporters. As early as January 1948, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Naimuddin Ahmed criticised the bureaucracy as 'British created agents' of oppression in a leaflet. They demanded trimming of the top heavy bureaucracy, by abolishing the useless posts of divisional commissioners, deputy secretaries, joint secretaries, aid-de-camp of the Prime Minister and Parliamentary secretaries, for all these incurred heavy drain on the exchequer. They asked for direct contact between the secretaries and the people, and demanded that the participants in the struggle for Pakistan take control of all aspects of life in the new nation.[64] A number of elected representatives in the Assembly were in favour of abolition of 'old relation between officers and the public'. 'The *Raja-Praja* (King-Subject) relationship', remarked an MLA, 'would not exist any longer.' There was now an expectation of exchange of 'heart and mind' between officers and the people.[65] This sentiment was reiterated by members of the Assembly who failed to notice 'any change of outlook of the officials'; to

them, they, the officers appeared to be the same as they were during the Raj.[66] Their 'superiority complex and vanity', nurtured during British rule, were 'abundantly exhibited', some members thought, when officers came in contact with the people. Quite often people were 'slighted and neglected'.[67] Mohammed Owais, a Muslim League MLA, criticised the officers on a number of occasions, and urged them to accept the fact that they were only public servants'[68] But to most of the League MLAs reform of bureaucracy essentially meant some kind of a new relation between the officers and the people. Members suggested reforms to help 'change the outlook of officials, if necessary, by arranging 'training classes' in order to make the latter suitable to serve a Representative Government.[69]

Criticism of officials from outside the Assembly was more in the form of demanding disciplinary measures against them than anything else. A public meeting at Govindacharan Park in Sylhet, on 19 November 1947, presided over by the Secretary of the Assam Muslim League, demanded the 'immediate removal' of the Deputy Commissioner for his alleged 'highandedness and nepotism'. Such public demands for disciplinary measures against officials were a feature of the early years of post-colonial history.

A climactic point in the contest between ML activists and the bureaucracy, often represented by district Magistrates, was reached when a controversy broke out in Barisal, on the issue of selecting a president for a meeting scheduled to celebrate the first year of independence on 14 August 1948. The local League members wanted their president to have this honour, while the DM secretly sent off a telegram asking for CS's permission to preside over the meeting. 'To satisfy League *izzat* (Prestige),' wrote the DM, Barisal, to the Chief Secretary, 'I agreed to ascertain your opinion on the subject'.[70] To the DM 'it was a childish matter', but to many League activists this symbolic act-of having the League President preside over Independence Day meetings- was a proof of the superiority of the organisation over the bureaucracy. Abul Mansur Ahmad, in his autobiography, recalled similar conflicts in Mymensingh.[71]

Access to state power made some League activists believe that they had a right to control the state machinery. The District Magistrate of Khulna reported that the League leaders of the district approached the Superintendent of Police and asked him to obey the 'unwritten law' that all cases of transfer and promotion of officers would have to be decided according to the wishes of the Muslim League.[72] However, the District Administration had learnt to neutralise such pressures from the League. The Police Committee observed that 'MLAs do approach District Officers but the latter are able to withstand the influence'. The Committee thought that it was 'a breach of discipline' and 'gross violation of the principle of good and just government' even if a Minister of Government sent for an officer of a District.[73]

Gradually the urge for popular control over the bureaucracy was eroded, as bureaucratic control over the political process increased. The ML activists soon found that their only recourse in the face of bureaucratic intransigence was the 'parliament of the street'. When the earlier mentioned SDO of Nilphamari did not cooperate with the sub-divisional Muslim League in distributing relief money on 19 December 1952, a 'huge procession' demanding enquiry against the SDO was staged by the League workers; and subsequently a 'complete hartal' was observed, demanding the resignation of the SDO.[74]

When popular resentment was vented against officers the Government protected them; it was thought inexpedient to punish officers, as it could affect the 'morale and prestige of the service.'[75] Most of the time the officers were defended and protected by the Ministers, and not infrequently by the Prime Minister, who thought that 'the Government and the people were one'.[76] In fact, the League Government was very much dependent on the officers for administration of the country. This was partly due to the contribution of the latter to strengthening the League by securing Government support during the Raj in many 'devious ways' and partly because the League accepted the officer's image of themselves as 'intellectually and morally superior to the politicians'.[77]

The Prime Minister used to yield too easily to all claims of 'superiority' on the part of the bureaucrats. He also credited the successful organisation and establishment of a stable government in the somewhat 'trying and strenuous condition' to a large extent to the untiring efforts and zeal of officers in charge of district administration.[78] This was not merely an expression of gratitude of a complacent Prime Minister towards the members of the civil service, it was also an admission of the reality of the power relations that existed between the executive and the politicians of the League.

IV

In our attempt to understand the reasons for the decline of the Muslim League in East Pakistan, we have explored the less familiar side of early East Pakistan history. We have focused particularly on the process of transition to a post-colonial polity, by highlighting the relationships of various sections of the peasantry with the Muslim League and the Governmental bureaucracy in East Bengal.

The post-colonial political order in East Bengal was born with congenital defects that flawed all attempts at transition to a democracy. The most important instrument of this transition, the Muslim League, was wanting, as we already know, in organisational strength, and in its formal organisational linkages with the masses. Its particular history did not contain a tradition of mass struggle against the Raj. However, many activists of the League took initiatives to expand and strengthen the base of popular support, by espousing the cause of the people. But the League leaders in the government failed to take up the hegemonic task of broadening the scope of alliances with the masses, by including them in the process of making and implementing decisions that were critical to the development of democracy and nationhood. National unity could only sustain itself through voluntary participation of its constituent elements; thus the limits to participation were a sure source of decay of the Muslim League and democratic government. In order to ensure continued participation of the rural masses in land reform, water management

and in food procurement and distribution, beyond the immediate contingencies like natural disasters,it was necessary that the benefits were clearly perceived by the people. But due to the dominance of vested interests within the League[79] and the presence of an 'overdeveloped' bureaucracy in the state,[80] the League failed to encourage such initiatives from lower level activists and sections of the peasantry of East Bengal.

Over time, the bureaucratic hold over planning, organising and executing nation-building projects strengthened. Use was made of acts, rules, circulars, and orders framed by the British Government to centralise powers in the hands of the bureaucracy. Even fresh ordinances curbing freedom of association and speech were issued on the pretext of national security.[81] At lower levels, the district bureaucracy continued to retain monopolistic control over all fundamental institutions and processes of decision making, as before. Thus, in the East Bengal political system, the Government led by the Muslim League failed to impinge on the administrative system forcefully enough to foster an atmosphere of democratic participation in all spheres of nation-building. The Muslim League rule saw instead a shift of power and authority in the favour of the civil service, already notorious for its abuse of power, its incompetence and corruption.

Being disgruntled with such administration both at the district and provincial level, many party activists dissociated themselves from the party and launched strong criticism against the government in various public forums. Quite understandably, *zulum* and corruption of officers are major themes in this critique, informed by juridical notions of power and contract in public affairs, which drew their legitimacy from the parliamentary democratic traditions of the British in their own country, and, philosophically, from the Enlightenment tradition of Europe. But this process revealed the helplessness of the liberal elements of the League before the wielder of real power, the bureaucrats. Tragically, the politicians were now reduced only to a role of brokers between the people on the one side, and the state on the other. In the end the activists of the League, including those in the Government, were forced to realise that even a petty official in the

'steel frame' was somebody they had to kowtow to for favour. To a certain extent this explains the ambiguity inherent in the relationship between officials and the people, a point we have discussed in chapter 4. Ziring observed that the people displayed little confidence in 'their representatives' and their experience taught them to look to other authority when their welfare was threatened.[82] In December 1951 the Governor of the Province, in his tour diary, also noted this aspect of the people's behaviour towards 'office holders of political organisation'. He mentioned that the people had more confidence in public servants than in elected representatives.[83] For this, the politics of the League had a lot to answer for. Instead of politicising issues concerning the 'welfare' of the people, the League activists started influencing and relying on public servants for distribution of the resources of the government of East Pakistan.

Gradually a situation developed when the ML was subject to the pull of two contrary forces: one of bureaucracy, that drew together a certain number of League politicians, especially those in the Government, often described as the 'Sarkari Dal' (Government's Party); and the other, of the activists who failed to make the League a mass based democratic organisation and felt frustrated at this failure. Whatever contact that was established between the people and the League in the preindependence period lingered on with the splitaway section of the League, now mobilized mostly under the banner of the Awami League (or People's League). By 1954 the point had been reached, to borrow from Gramsci, when the social classes became detached from their party in that particular form, with the particular men who represented and led them.[84] The Muslim League was no longer recognised by these classes as their representative party any more.

As a result the Muslim League was rejected totally in the election of March 1954. But the dream and expectation which inspired large numbers of Muslim peasants of East Bengal and the middle class to rally round the demand for their 'holy land' remained unfulfilled. For many people, democratic participation in the affairs of the nation began and ended at the ballot-box. The victory at the polls turned out to be a defeat of the political party only.

The functionaries of the State managed to remain above the control of the elected representatives, and democratic checks on the former's increasing tendency to arrogate power to themselves proved to be lacking in force and authority.[85]

Through an elaborate and well contrived conspiracy, the rule of the bureaucracy continued till the ruling clique in Karachi decided to change the form of rule by imposing Martial Law on 7 October, 1958. The saga of a democratic form of state had come to an end by then. Never again could the Awami League make a comeback and consolidate political power, at least not within the framework of Pakistan. Even in Bangladesh, the new nation-state was relinquished too soon to the fold of the civil military bureaucracy. This time it took even less than 4 years for the bureaucracy to do away with the political system advocated by the Awami League. Ever since then, they have been in control of the political process in Bangladesh. In analysing the regression in Bangladesh politics after the Military takeover in August 1975, one cannot but be reminded of Marx's excellent comment in the Eighteenth Brumaire, 'Instead of society having conquered a new content for itself, it seems that the State only returned to its oldest form, to the shamelessly simple domination of the sabre and the cowl'.[86]

And in this process the political parties have been reduced to a position of helpless onlookers in the affairs of the state, only to be occasionally shocked to attention by the routine upsurge of the masses, claiming, usually unsuccessfully ,their right to participate in the organization of their own lives and dreams.

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3 Kamruddin Ahmad, Social History , p.191.

4 Umar, *Bhasha Andolon*, Vol. 1, p.212.

5 ibid. p.213.

6 Going through Z H Zaidi (ed) M.A. Jinnah and Ispahani Correspondence, 1936-1948, Hugh Tinker made this remark about the ML. See Hugh Tinker, *South Asia* Vol.1, No.2, September 1978, p.127.

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61 PM's speech at the Annual Conference of the Commissioners of Division and Heads of Departments on 10-11 January, 1949, Home Poll. Bundle.

62 DM, Khulna, Extract from the fortnightly Confidential Report, dated 26-10-49, Home Poll., B-progs, March 1951, Nos. 360-415, Emphasis mine.

63 Confidential fortnightly Report of Mymensingh District for the week ending 29.11.47 Home Police, B-progs, April, 1949, Nos. 263-264.

64 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Naimuddin Ahmed, *Durbhaga Jonosadharan*, Dhaka, 1948.

65 EBLA, progs, Vol.4. No.7, p.65, Emphasis mine.

66 ibid, p.79.

67 ibid, p.98.

68 ibid, Vol.10 No.1 p.350.

69 ibid, p.143.

70 D O from DM, Barisal, on 5-8-48, Home Poll., B-progs, March 1951.

71 Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha*, p.318.

72 DM, Khulna, Extract from the Fortnightly Confidential Report dated 26-10-49, Home Poll., B-progs., March 1951, Nos. 360-415.

73 Report of the Police Committee, p.8.

74 Home Poll. Bundle No.137.

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76 Annual Conference of Commissioners and Heads of Departments, 10-11 January, 1949, Home Poll. Bundle No.147.

77 Humayun Kabir, Politics, pp.53-54.

78 PM's Speech at the Conference of the Commissioners and Heads of Departments.

79 See Umar, *Bhasha Andolon*, Vol. 2, p.46.

80 Hamza Alavi, 'The State in Post Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh' in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, New York, 1973.

81 Jayanta Kumar Roy, Democracy and Nationalism, p.52 and p.59.

82 Ziring, 'Failure,' p.330.

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85 For an inside story see Ataur Rahman Khan, *Ojaratir*, also Tofazzal Hossain (Manik Mia) *Pakistani Rajnitir Bish Bachar*, (ed.) Abdul Hafiz, Dhaka, 1981, pp.44-45.

86 Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Moscow, 1977, p.13.

GLOSSARY

Abwab	Illegal exaction.
Adhiar	Sharecropper.
Akbar	Great.
Allah	God.
Aman	Main paddy crop sown during rainy season and harvested during beginning of dry season.
Anna	One-sixteenth part of a rupee.
Annadata	Foodgiver.
Ansar	Helper, Civil Armed Guard.
Atta	Coarse flour.
Aus	Paddy sown in early rain and harvested during rainy season.
Azan	Muslim call for prayer.
Baich	Competition
Bargadar	See Adhiar.
Bawa	Particular variety of rice grown in parts of Mymensingh.
Bazar	Market.
Beel, Bil	Marsh
Begar	Unpaid labour
Bhag	Share.
Bhagidar	See Adhiar.
Bichar	Trial/Judgement.
Bidroho	Rebellion.
Bigha	About one third acre.
Boro	Paddy grown in dry season.
Char	Accreted land from river.
Chawkidar	Village watchman.
Choto	Little
Crore	Ten million.
Dafadar	Rural police.

Dagi	Convict.
Dainik	Daily.
Dakhila	Rent
Danda	Truncheon.
Daroga	Police sub-inspector.
Dawal	Reaper, seasonal migratory agricultural labour.
Dhankarari	See tanka
Dharma	Moral code, religion.
Durbikhkha	Famine
Elaka	Area
Gantidar	See Adhiar.
Goonda	Ruffian.
Hajot	Police lock-up.
Haor	Large swamp.
Hartal	Strike.
Hat	Periodic market.
Hizrat	Migration.
Id	Muslim religious festival.
Izzat	Prestige, honour.
Jatha	Spear.
Jhanda	Flag.
Jotedar	Stratum next to land lord and quasi-land lord.
Julum/Zulum	Oppression
Jumma	Friday prayer.
Kabial	Poet.
Katra	Spear.
Keyamat	Doomsday.
Khal	Canal.
Kharach	Expenditure.
Khasmahal	Crown/Government land.

Koch	Fishing implement similar to forked spear.
Krishak	Peasant.
Lakh	One hundred thousand.
Lal	Red.
Larai	Struggle.
Lathi	Bamboo staff.
Ma-Baap	Literally mother and father; indicates dependency relationship.
Mamuli	Insignificant, Ordinary.
Manjil	Mansion.
Matbar	Village faction leader.
Maulavi	Religious teacher.
Maulid Sharif	Muslim congregation chanting praise for Prophet Muhammad.
Maund	Nearly forty kilogram.
Mela	Fair.
Mofussil	Small town.
Muchi	Cobbler.
Mujahid	One who participates in religious war.
Mullah	Religious leader.
Musalman	Muslim.
Nankar	Peasant paying service rent.
Nouka	Boat.
Noukawala	Boatowner.
Pir	Saint/Religious guide.
Pol	Bridge.
Polo	Bell shaped fish trap to catch fish in shallow water.
Polua	Person who catches fish with a polo.
Pradeshik	Provincial.
Puthi	Folk poem.
Rupee	Unit of currency.
Ryot	Tenant.

Sabha	Association.
Sadiana	Relating to wedding.
Seer	2.057 lb.; nearly a kilogram.
Shahid	Martyr.
Shalara	Literally wife's younger brothers; often used as a term of abuse
Sharia	The laws of Islam.
Shorder	Leader.
Snan	Bath/Ritual bath.
Sulfi	Forked spear.
Talukdar	Land lord or tenure holder; usually collector of rent from raiyats.
Tanka	Fixed-rent in kind in some areas of Mymensingh.
Tankadar	Who pays tanka.
Tata	See Sulfi.
Tehsil	Basic revenue collection unit.
Tek	Loop.
Thana	Rural police station.
Waz Mahfil	Assembly where religious speeches are delivered.
Zakat	The annual payment of one-fortieth of a Muslim's total assets as a poor rate.
Zamindar	Landlord.

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